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SUBJECT: TEPATITLAN'S NEWEST EXPORT - ITS WOMEN

¶1. Summary: At a recent promotional event for the tourism industry of Tepatitlan, the region's women were promoted as the strongest draw for foreign tourists. According to a local official, the number of prostitution arrests have spiked recently, raising questions about the area's vulnerability to trafficking and other violence against women as a result of the promotional campaign. End Summary.

¶2. The city of Tepatitlan (population 83,000) is part of Los Altos de Jalisco, the high-elevation region of northern Jalisco, about an hour's drive from Guadalajara. Due to a larger-than-average settlement of Spaniards and little intermarriage with indigenous tribes, the population of the city is known to have lighter hair and blue eyes. This, and the fact that a large percentage of the local young men have found work in the states, has given the region a reputation for having a large population of attractive and available single women.

¶3. CONOFF recently attended a tourism promotion event in Tepatitlan for representatives of foreign governments where a glossy brochure with scantily-clad women holding local products was featured. According to the presenters, including the Director of Tourism, the women of Tepatitlan are the strongest draw for foreign tourist dollars. The city's relative proximity to the metropolitan area of Guadalajara makes it easily accessible to foreign tourists visiting the region. The local beauty queen, Miss Tepatitlan 2007, was in attendance mingling with guests and being touted as Tepatitlan's greatest "export".

¶4. According to Tepatitlan's Coordinator of External Relations, arrests and suspicions of prostitution have risen sharply since the new campaign for tourists began approximately six months ago. (No American citizens have been arrested so far). Despite the increase in detentions, there are no plans by the municipality to address this problem or increase enforcement or education. On the contrary, new brochures and promotional materials featuring the women of Tepatitlan will be produced in larger quantities.

¶5. Comment: Although there is not yet any sign of trafficking or blatant promotion of sex tourism, conditions are ripe in Tepatitlan for these issues to surface. The ambivalence of local officials to this potentially serious problem is disturbing considering the risk of the region becoming a local hub for crimes against women.

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